

THIRD NIGHT ON BROADWAY

We came back to The Silver Cloud Hotel on Broadway and Madison in Seattle one more time. We were joined with cousins from Madison, Wisconsin, a brother from Palm Springs and a niece and her husband from Los Angeles. A memorial service is usually a family reunion.

This particular drama had at least one more scene. Other dramas on Broadway came to mind as we drove from the hotel toward the Seattle Yacht Club where Bob was past Commodore. I was born in the same hospital as Bob on Broadway. In 1987 my brothers and I picked up my dad's ashes at a funeral home a couple blocks north on Broadway. A few blocks beyond that there was once a church where a committee gathered to discuss and approve my ordination.

We were early but the parking lot was filling. People approached the entry in the sober manner of people approaching a funeral. That changed in short order when they were greeted at the door, not by a funeral director passing out programs, but by a server passing out glasses of wine. Bob's idea I am sure.

No music – although I had campaigned for a bit of jazz as a nod to Bob's tastes – except for the burbling chorus of a couple hundred voices. We family were minority and strangers in this congregation, where the Yacht Club members were hosts. Bob's wife, Evalie, mingled and greeted long time friends.

Bob wanted a celebrative event with few speeches and lots of party. A few had been pre-selected. The amiable master of ceremonies had an egg-timer to keep the program in hand. Bob's brother, Chuck, was given a double turn on the egg timer. He was the only brother, after all.

Two others offered remarks and memories that made us all proud of Bob. Just before proceedings began I learned that I was on the list of speakers. If you know much about speech making you know that a brief speech takes more planning than a long one. I hadn't expected to be back on stage again, but there I was. And again, unprepared.

I begged for leniency from the timer. I was, after all Bob's first cousin, second in line, only six months younger with a photo of the two of us in diapers to prove it. Not knowing most of the crowd I asked for a show of hands of representative groups. Roosevelt High grads had already been noted, along with fraternity brothers and members of the band he once directed. I wanted to know how many were attorneys, because Bob loved his associates in his practice of law. Many raised hands, even a judge and a number of clients. I had the Yacht Club members raise hands. More than half the crowd were in that group. Friends of daughter Kay and Carla came in support, along with a number of us relatives made up the crowd.

I was glad to hear stories of Bob I had never heard and thanked those who shared them. I didn't say all I could and probably said more than I should. I might have told them that at one time Bob and I said we wanted to be 10 years old forever, or that he was best man in our wedding. I did say that their presence was a greater tribute and comfort than any words we could speak. I sat down and didn't dare ask how long I had gone on.

Churches have rituals for such times and so do Yacht Clubs. The presiding Commodore brought out a whistle typically used on ship to pipe sailors up from the lower decks. We were instructed to extend a left arm, palms up, and to lift them upward when he piped the whistle. The purpose was to send Bob in the right direction. I guess that's the purpose of funerals. Churches seem to need more prayers and rituals to do the same thing.

That was all there was to the "ceremony." The on stage part of the drama was over. Jean (who always times these things) said it took one hour and five minutes, time to knit one dish cloth!

People stood and sought the food table. Servers passed out more wine. Family members were sought out and personally greeted. Old friends gathered in small groups. A loss is always personal but it helps when it is shared. I sensed that everyone there genuinely felt that loss.

So, that's it. People who went through this drama changed their focus from dying to living. What we remember and celebrate and toast is not that Bob died, but that Bob lived. And in our minds, hearts and very being he lives still.

— Art Morgan, February 11, 2010